

Oxacycle fused [1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene derivatives: synthesis, electronic structure, electrochemical properties, ionisation potential, and crystal structure

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Abstract: The molecular properties of [1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene (BTBT) are vulnerable to the structural modifications which in turn are decided by the functionalization of the backbone. Hence versatile synthetic strategies are needed to discover the properties of this molecule. To address this, we have attempted heteroatom (oxygen) functionalization of BTBT by a concise and easily scalable synthesis. Four-fold hydroxy substituted BTBT is the key intermediate, from which the compounds 2,3,7,8-bis(ethylenedioxy)-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene and 2,3,7,8-bis(methylenedioxy)-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene are synthesized. The difference in ether functionalities on the BTBT scaffold influences the ionisation potential values substantially. The crystal structure reveals the transformation of the herringbone motif in bare BTBT towards π stacked columns in the newly synthesized derivatives. The results are further elaborated with the aid of quantum chemical calculations.

Introduction

Thienoacenes have been attracting interest due to their potential application in materials science, especially in search for high performing organic field effect transistors (OFETs).^[1] Among the plethora of such organic semiconductors, [1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene (referred later as BTBT and shown as **1** in Fig 1) derivatives have become the state of the art material for OFETs, attributed by their easily accessible synthetic protocols, exceptional chemical as well as thermal stability, high carrier

mobility and modulation of their electronic properties by band gap tuning *via* straightforward functionalization of the core.^[2]

Even subtle structural variations may lead to unusual changes in their properties; for example, bromination of the BTBT core alters the solid state packing which in turn affects the molecular orbitals' spacing.^[3] Therefore, synthetic exploration is essential to gain insight onto the molecular orbitals, redox potentials, π - π stacking and crystal structure.

The basic scaffold of BTBT has been synthesized even on gram scales and easily accessible one step methodologies have also been reported.^[4] However, the synthetic efforts have been majorly focussed on the substitution with long alkyl groups at 2,7 positions of the BTBTs owing to their excellent mobility values along with intact solid state ordering facilitated by intermolecular van der Waals interactions of the alkyl groups.^[5] On the other hand, introduction of bulky fragments at the same positions have been attempted to gain control over supramolecular organisation.^[6] The functionalisation on other positions of BTBT core is relatively less explored^[7] although such molecules are prophetic in patents.^[8] The reason behind this might be the tedious synthetic pathways as well as the lack of modular building blocks.

Alternately, computational predictions emphasize heteroatom functionalisation of the organic semiconductor core as an efficient pathway in comparison to extension of π conjugated systems in yielding stable and efficient organic semiconductors.^[9] This perception has triggered various synthetic advances towards heteroatom containing organic semiconductors,^[10] however such modification is rare on BTBT core.^[11] In this context we became interested in particularly oxygen containing BTBT ethers, that are expected to have lower oxidation potential which is pertinent in carrier injection aspects of OFETs.^[12] Among ether functionalized acenes, oxacyclic ethers are preferred over alkyl analogues due to their stability and possibility of better ordering in the solid state.^[13] In a recent report by Mori *et al.*, the synthesis of dihydroxy BTBT is provided which is further used as a hydrogen bonding motif for studying the solid state arrangement in its charge transfer salt.^[14] This intermediate fuelled our interest in designing the four fold oxy-functionalised BTBTs to explore the molecular properties focusing on the influence of oxygen atom on the structural orientation.

Herein, we report a simple, inexpensive and straightforward synthetic strategy to afford the tetra-hydroxy BTBT which is a highly relevant intermediate towards variously functionalised BTBT systems. As a preliminary study, the synthesis of two new oxacyclic BTBTs 2,3,7,8-bis(ethylenedioxy)-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene (**2**) and 2,3,7,8-bis(methylenedioxy)-[1]

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benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene (**3**) are depicted along with their electrochemical, electronic, and single crystal structure which are compared to the well documented BTBT. To the best of our knowledge this is the first time the depicted strategy has been utilised on BTBT for four fold functionalization. Our synthetic protocol can be considered as a promising starting point, as the tetra-hydroxy BTBT appears to be a prolific intermediate towards a number of interesting chemical transformations on the BTBT core.

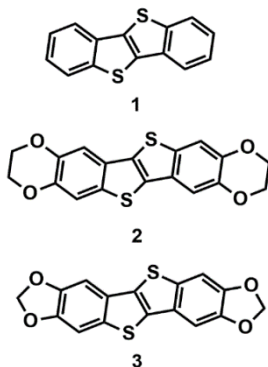


Figure 1. BTBT **1**, ether appended BTBT derivatives **2** and **3**

Results and Discussion

For the synthesis of oxacyclic BTBT, the attachment of the heteroatom to the core was achieved *a priori* (Scheme 1). Starting from 6-bromo veratraldehyde **4**, acetal protection of the aldehyde functionality was effected with trimethyl orthoformate in quantitative yield. Then Br/Li exchange on **5** was carried out in THF at -78°C which was followed by S-methylation resulting in 4,5-dimethoxy-2-(methylthio)benzaldehyde **6**. McMurry coupling on **6** resulted in desired stilbene **7** in 65% yield. The cyclisation was effected on the stilbene by treating with excess of I_2 in refluxing acetic acid^[7] under dark, to result in the 2,3,7,8- tetra methoxy BTBT **8** in 87% yield. **8** was used as the parent compound on which four fold deprotection of the methoxy groups were carried out using an excess of BBr_3 (8 equ.) resulting in the 2,3,7,8-tetra hydroxy BTBT **9** in 95% yield. This molecule being particularly reactive was used in the next step immediately. Compound **9** was subjected to alkylation using 1,2 dibromoethane in DMSO^[13b] resulting in dioxane fused BTBT **2** which was purified by vacuum sublimation. O-Alkylation of **9** by adapting a modified protocol^[15] using CsF and dibromomethane in DMF was attempted to synthesize **3** in 40% yield (after vacuum sublimation). Starting from compound **4**, the overall yield of **2** and **3** were 12% and 15% respectively. The synthesized BTBT derivatives possess reasonable solubility in common organic solvents and were fully characterized by NMR, mass spectrometry, UV/Vis spectroscopy, and cyclic voltammetry (Refer the ESI).

As already reported, substituted and unsubstituted BTBT derivatives are known to present at least one oxidation process which conducts to the corresponding radical cation species. In this context, electrochemical behaviour of the BTBT core is strongly

affected by changing the nature and the position of the substituents. For this reason, the electrochemical properties of the 2, 3, 7, 8-tetramethoxyBTBT **8** was investigated, in dichloromethane, by cyclic voltammetry (CV) (Fig S19). Electronically, **8** resembles to the target compounds **2** and **3** but it has the decisive advantages to be considerably more soluble and to be accessible in larger amount. Methoxy groups introduced onto the molecular backbone in any position may simply act as an electron-donating group. As expected, compound **8** shows two successive oxidation processes at 0.55 and 1.10 V (vs Fc^+/Fc) which could be reasonably assigned to the formation of the corresponding radical cation and the dication species respectively. More surprisingly, the stability of the isolated radical is only observed at high scan rate (5V.s^{-1}) that is translated on the CV by a perfect reversibility of the signal. In fact, at lower scan rate, the reduction peak presents all characteristics of adsorption phenomenon including a cathodic shift of the potential (even when the platinum electrode is replaced by a vitreous carbon one). The appearance of any new signal in oxidation during subsequent cycles allows us to suggest that the radical cation is not involved in any polymerisation process but more probably in intramolecular π -stacking as already observed for rich planar electron donor such as tetrathiafulvalene.^[16] Ionisation potentials (IP) of powders of compounds **2** and **3** have been measured by photoelectron spectroscopy in air (PESA). Surprisingly, IP differs substantially. **2** affords a value of 5.7 eV whereas **3** exhibits a much lower ionisation potential of 5.2 eV (Fig S20-S21). The results are in the same range as previous measurements on other BTBT derivatives, which highlight once more the large importance that crystal packing has on optoelectronic properties.^[17, 18] The properties of the newly synthesized compounds are listed in Table 1.

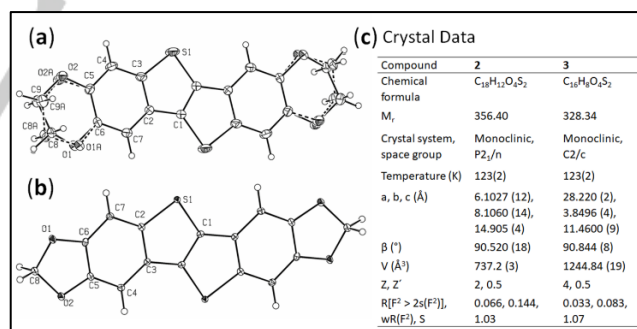
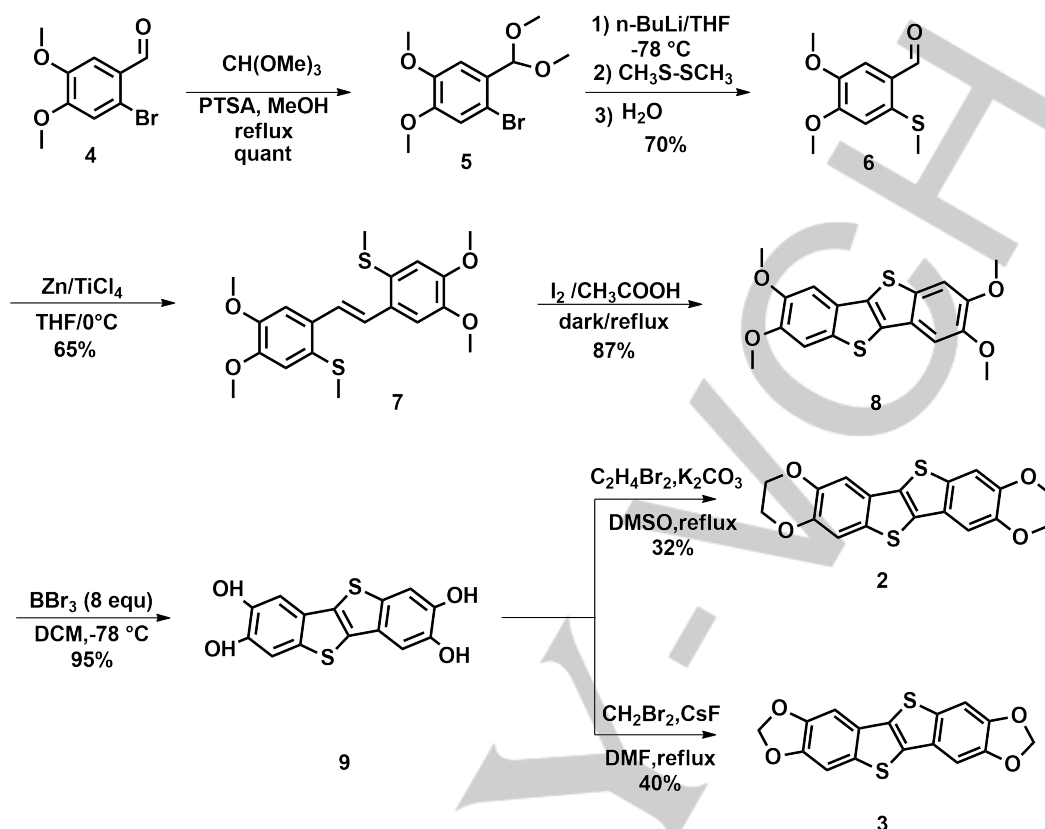


Figure 2. (a) and (b) : A molecular view of compounds **2** and **3**, respectively, showing the atom-labelling scheme. Displacement ellipsoids are drawn at 30% probability level. Unlabelled atoms are generated by symmetry. (c) Table showing crystal data for compounds **2** and **3**. A detailed crystal data table is given in Table S1 as supplementary material.

Single crystals of **2** were grown from hot DMSO while those of **3** were obtained by solubilizing the compound in melted naphthalene followed by slow cooling. Molecular views of the compounds **2** and **3** are given in Fig 2. Both the compounds crystallize in a monoclinic unit cell with $Z' = 0.5$, that is the asymmetric unit contains half of each molecule. The space group of compound **2** is $P2_1/n$ while for **3** it is $C2/c$. The crystal structures of the compounds **2** and **3** are shown in Fig 3.



Scheme 1. Synthesis of 2,3,7,8-bis(ethylenedioxy)-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene (**2**) and 2,3,7,8-bis(methylenedioxy)-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene (**3**)

The crystal structures in both **2** and **3** are mainly stabilized by C-H \cdots O type hydrogen bonds coupled with $\pi\cdots\pi$ interactions while in **2** C-H $\cdots\pi$ interactions also contributes to the overall crystal packing. The unsubstituted BTBT **1** crystallises in a “layer by layer” organization where molecules in each layer are packed in a herringbone arrangement^[19] which is a very common packing motif observed in other BTBT derivatives.^{[5a], [6a], [17]} However, the crystal structure in compounds **2** and **3** is stabilized by $\pi\cdots\pi$ interactions forming parallel cofacial π -stacked columns. Such coplanar crystal packing have been observed in brominated BTBT^[3] as well as in other thieno[3,2-b]thiophene derivatives like BBTBDT.^[20] As observed in compound **2** (Fig 3a), each π -stacked column is bound to its nearest neighbour by C7-H7 \cdots O1 type bonds forming a 2-dimensional network. C-H $\cdots\pi$ interactions only act as additional reinforcement within these 2-dimensional assemblies in **2**. In compound **3**, C8-H8A \cdots O1 H-bond connects adjacent molecules to form parallel H-bonded steps. Further the intermolecular $\pi\cdots\pi$ interactions connect the parallel steps in form of two dimensional sheets (Fig 3b). Interestingly, similar dioxolane-functionalized pentacenes have shown to form herringbone structure as well as “rolled” π -stack assembly depending on the nature of the substitution.^[13c] These results

reaffirm the fact that similar kinds of structural modification on organic semiconductor cores cannot be generalized.

In order to have a clear quantitative and visual insight into the intermolecular interactions, the Hirshfeld surfaces of unsubstituted BTBT **1**, compounds **2** and **3**, and brominated BTBT are illustrated in Fig S22, showing surfaces that have been mapped over a d_{norm} range of -0.15 to 1.50 Å. This allows a rational understanding of the subtleties of crystal packing arising due to BTBT functionalization. The dominant intermolecular interactions in the Hirshfeld surfaces can be observed as the bright red spots which are essentially a manifestation of the C-H \cdots O interactions in **2** and **3** while they correspond to C-H $\cdots\pi$ interactions in **1** and H \cdots Br contacts in Br-BTBT-Br. Analysis of the 2D fingerprint plots (Fig 4) clearly reveals the differences in the packing environments of all the compounds. The C-H $\cdots\pi$ bonds in **1** and **2** are well manifested and appear as a pair of spikes of almost equal lengths around the (di, de) regions (1.6 Å, 1.1 Å) and (1.1 Å, 1.6 Å). In both **2** and **3**, presence of spikes in the (di, de) regions (1.4 Å, 1.1 Å) and (1.1 Å, 1.4 Å) are due to the presence of C-H \cdots O bonds. In case of **3** and Br-BTBT-Br, the pair of wings appearing at (di, de) regions of (1.7 Å, 1.1 Å) and (1.1 Å, 1.7 Å) are a manifestation of short S \cdots H contacts. The presence of high concentration of

points around the regions $d_i = d_e = 1.8 \text{ \AA}$ in **3** and Br-BTBT-Br suggests the higher contribution of $\pi \cdots \pi$ interactions to the crystal packing in these two compounds. In Br-BTBT-Br the contribution of Br \cdots Br contacts can also be traced in $d_i = d_e$ regions spanning from 1.8–2.0 \AA . The relative area are depicted in **Fig 4** (bottom panel) for all the compounds. In **2** and **3** C-H \cdots O interactions play the major role in the overall crystal packing. The contribution of O \cdots H contacts to the Hirshfeld surface is 19% in **2** and 27.9% in **3**. The quantitative analysis shows that C \cdots H contacts corresponding to C-H \cdots π interactions account for 35.3% in **1** and 27.1% in **2** while in **3** and Br-BTBT-Br it is respectively 13.1% and 5% of the Hirshfeld surface area. In Br-BTBT-Br where the packing is mainly governed by $\pi \cdots \pi$ interactions the contribution of C \cdots C contacts is significantly higher at 17.5% while in **1** it is only 0.8%. The S \cdots H contacts also vary significantly, from 8.1% in **1** to 17.6% in Br-BTBT-Br.

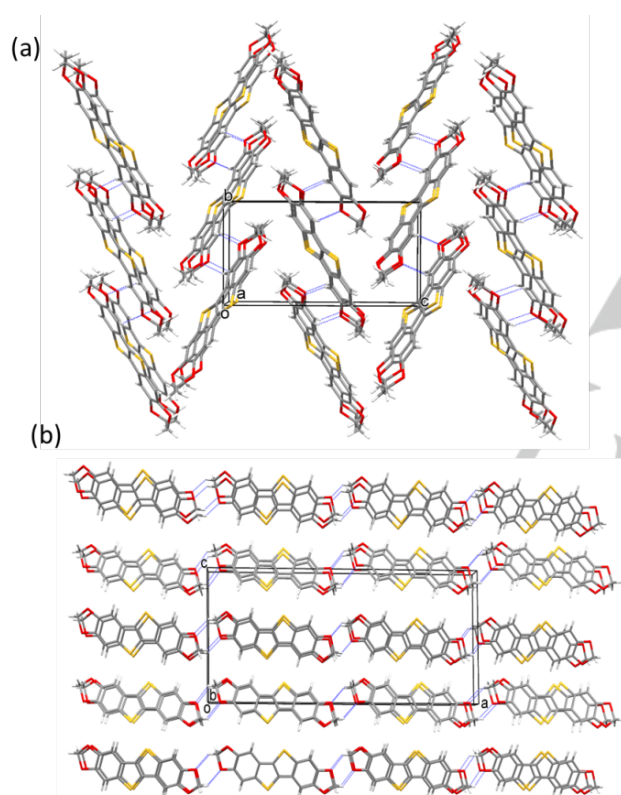


Figure 3. (a) Crystal packing diagram for compound **2**. C-H \cdots O bonds are shown with dotted lines while the stacked molecules interact via $\pi \cdots \pi$ interactions. (b) Crystal packing diagram for compound **3**. C-H \cdots O bonds are shown with dotted lines while the stacked molecules interact via $\pi \cdots \pi$ interactions leading to a parallel two dimensional network in the crystallographic b-direction.

Finally, the geometric and electronic properties of isolated tetramethoxy-substituted BTBT **8** have been investigated at the quantum-chemical level (Density Functional Theory – B3LYP/6-31G**). It exhibits two stable conformers, with the most stable planar (**Fig 5**) and the second less stable by about 4.5 kcal/mol that exhibits methyl groups being perpendicular to the molecular plane (**Fig S23**).

Table 1 Optoelectronic properties of BTBTs **8**, **2** and **3**

	Experimental IP (eV)	Predicted HOMO (eV)	Predicted LUMO (eV)	Optical band gap ^b (eV)	λ_{max} ^c (nm)
8	--- ^a	-4.92	-0.8	3.553	344
2	5.7	---	---	3.532	347
3	5.2	---	---	3.512	350

[a] Not measured. [b] Calculated from the absorption edge using Tauc plot. [c] Solution absorption spectra in DMSO.

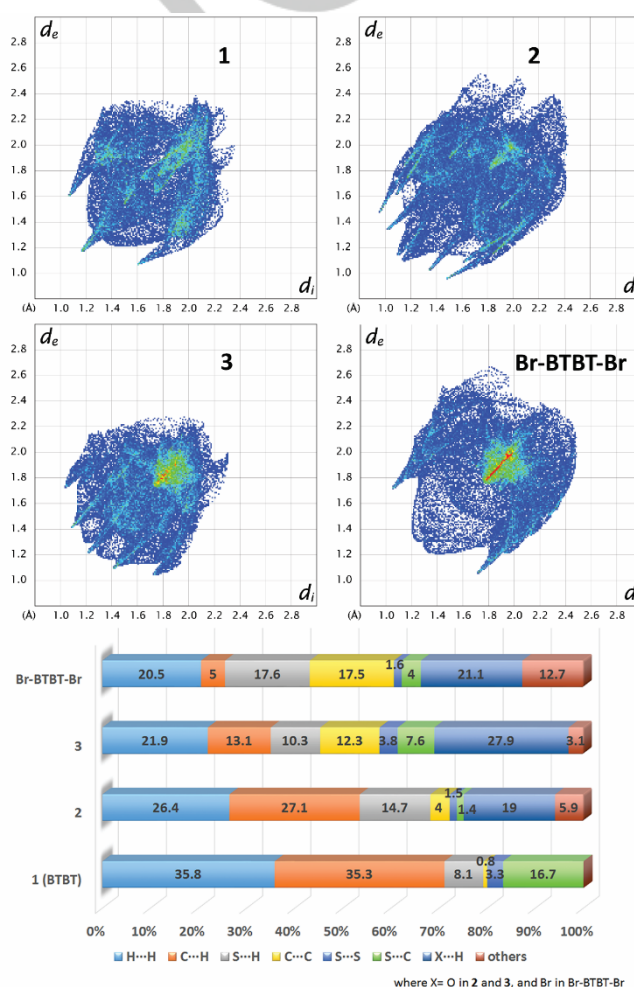


Figure 4. Top panels: Fingerprint plots for compounds **1**, **2**, **3** and Br-BTBT-Br. Bottom panel: Relative contributions to the Hirshfeld surface areas for the various intermolecular contacts for compounds **1**, **2**, **3** and Br-BTBT-Br.

The highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) of **8** is destabilized by 0.67 eV compared to the unsubstituted BTBT (-4.92 eV and -5.59 eV for **8** and **1**, respectively), which should impact hole injection from electrodes. The shape of the HOMO wavefunction is also significantly modified by the methoxy substitution leading to the appearance of nodes on the sulphur atoms. Interestingly, this new orbital pattern originates from the increase in the conjugation pathway over the oxygen atoms; as a matter of fact, when the methyl groups lie perpendicular to the conjugated backbone, oxygen atoms are less coupled to the π -electrons of the BTBT core and the HOMO wavefunction resembles that of an unsubstituted BTBT (Fig S23). Since compounds **2** and **3** are planar in their crystalline structure, the ether substitution is expected to modify the shape of the HOMO level and hence their hole transport properties. However, quantifying this impact is quite difficult on the basis of single molecule properties since it requires a combined quantum-chemical and kinetic Monte Carlo study^[6, 17-19] which is out of the scope of the present paper.

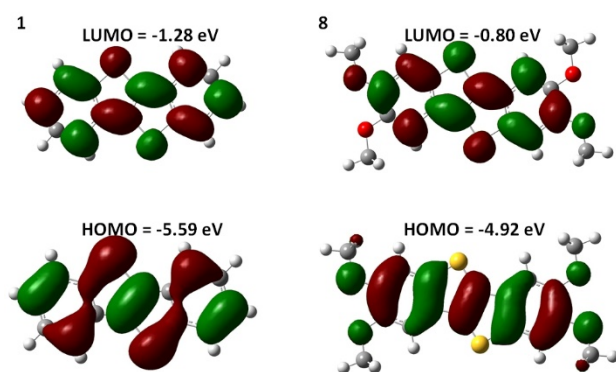


Figure 5. Representation of the shape of the HOMO and LUMO levels of unsubstituted BTBT **1** (left) and tetramethoxy-substituted BTBT **8** (right).

Recently, several reputed scientists have warned the organic electronic community that non-optimized OFETs are dominated by electrical contact resistance that give rise to overestimated mobility values.^[27] Since a comprehensive electrical characterization with reliable transport properties is out of the scope of this manuscript, we prefer not to report unreliable mobility values from quickly fabricated OFETs.

Conclusions

Two new oxacycle fused BTBT derivatives have been designed and synthesised successfully to evaluate the effect of such functionalization on the molecular electronic properties and crystal packing. When two oxygen atoms are incorporated in the BTBT core in six membered and five membered rings, the shape of the HOMO is significantly modified with no more weight on the sulphur atoms. The packing in the solid state changes also from herringbone motif to parallel cofacial π -stacked columns. These results show that very subtle synthetic modifications can evoke interesting changes in orbital geometry and in the solid state

ordering which eventually decides all the characteristic molecular and optoelectronic properties.

Experimental Section

Chemicals

All chemicals were purchased from Aldrich or Acros and used without further purification unless stated otherwise. All reactions using *n*-BuLi were performed in oven-dried glassware under Ar atmosphere. THF was dried by distillation over Na in the presence of benzophenone. Anhydrous *N,N*-dimethylformamide was kept over 4Å molecular sieves. Column chromatography: SiO₂ Kieselgel 60 (Macherey-Nagel, particle size 0.04–0.063 mm). TLC: precoated SiO₂ plates Kieselgel 60F254 (Merck). ¹H-NMR (300 MHz) and ¹³C-NMR (75 MHz) spectra were recorded on a Bruker Avance 300 spectrometer; chemical shifts (δ) are given in ppm and the coupling constants (*J*) in Hz. The residual signal of the solvent was taken as internal reference standard. Electron impact mass spectra (EI-MS) were recorded on a Waters AutoSpec 6F instrument.

1-bromo-2-(dimethoxymethyl)-4,5-dimethoxybenzene 5: A mixture of 2-bromo-4,5-dimethoxybenzaldehyde (12.5 g, 51 mmol), trimethyl-O-formate (6.5 g, 61.2 mmol) and *p*-toluenesulfonic acid (97 mg, 0.51 mmol) in methanol (75 mL) was refluxed under argon for 16h. After cooling to room temperature, the crude mixture was poured into a saturated solution of NaHCO₃. The mixture was extracted with diethyl ether. The combined organic layer was further washed with brine and dried over MgSO₄, filtered and evaporated. 30.0 g of **5** was obtained in pure form as yellow oil in quantitative yield which becomes solid on cooling. Spectral data were in agreement with the already reported value.^[21]

4,5-dimethoxy-2-(methylthio)benzaldehyde 6: A 2.5M solution of *n*-BuLi in hexanes (49.6 mL, 123.9 mmol) was added slowly to a solution of **5** (30.06 g, 103.29 mmol) in anhydrous THF (500 mL) at -78°C under argon. After 1h, a solution of dimethyldisulphide (23mL, 258.23 mmol) was added dropwise and the resulting mixture was stirred at -78°C for 3h and at room temperature for 16h. The solution was then carefully poured into water (300 mL). The mixture was extracted with CH₂Cl₂ (5 x 100 mL) and the combined organic layer was further washed with brine, dried over MgSO₄, filtered and evaporated. The crude was then purified by washing with hot hexane. 15.32 g of **6** was obtained as beige powder in 70% yield. mp 106–111°C; ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 300 MHz): δ 2.49 (s, 3H), 3.92 (s, 3H), 3.97 (s, 3H), 6.90 (s, 1H), 7.37 (s, 1H), 10.37 (s, 1H); ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 75 MHz) δ 18.6, 56.2, 56.3, 111.6, 112.0, 128.1, 136.7, 148.1, 154.1, 189.9; EI-HRMS obsd 212.0512, calcd 212.0507 [C₁₀H₁₂O₃S].

(E)-1,2-bis(4,5-dimethoxy-2-(methylthio)phenyl)ethane 7: To a suspension of Zn (4.62 g, 70.66 mmol) in anhydrous THF (200 mL) at 0 °C, TiCl₄ (7.8 mL, 70.66 mmol) was added dropwise, and the resulting mixture was heated at reflux for 1 h. After cooling down to 0 °C, a solution of **6** (5 g, 23.55 mmol) in anhydrous THF (50 mL) was added, and the resulting mixture was heated at reflux overnight. After cooling to room temperature, the mixture was poured in saturated solution of NaHCO₃ (200 mL) and dichloromethane (200 mL) and stirred for 1h. The mixture was filtered through celite pad and washed with hot CHCl₃, and the layers of the filtrate were separated. The aqueous layer was extracted with dichloromethane, and the combined organic layer was dried over MgSO₄, filtered and evaporated. Recrystallization from toluene yielded **7** as yellow solid (3g, 65%): mp 158–164 °C; ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 300 MHz): δ 2.41 (s, 6H), 3.92 (s, 6H), 3.96 (s, 6H), 6.97 (s, 2H), 7.18 (s, 2H), 7.49 (s, 2H); ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 75 MHz) δ 19.2, 56.2, 108.9, 114.3, 126.4, 127.9, 131.8, 148.6, 149; EI-HRMS obsd 392.1103, calcd 392.1116 [C₂₀H₂₄O₄S₂].

2,3,7,8-tetramethoxy-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene 8: A solution of **7** (700 mg, 1.78 mmol) in AcOH (80 mL) at reflux was treated with powdered iodine (14.5 g, 57.06 mmol) and refluxed for 16h under argon in dark. After cooling to room temperature, the mixture was poured in sodium bisulphite solution (200 mL), and the solid collected by filtration. The filtered material was further washed with water and then with methanol. The residue was then subjected to column chromatography (silica, hot CHCl₃) to afford **8** as grey solid (560 mg, 87%). ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 300 MHz): δ 3.98 (s, 6H), 4.01 (s, 6H), 7.22 (s, 2H), 7.33 (s, 2H); ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 75 MHz) δ 56.3, 56.4, 103, 105.9, 127, 131.9, 134.1, 148.2, 148.6; EI-HRMS obsd 360.0493, calcd 360.0490 [C₁₈H₁₆O₄S₂]. UV-vis abs.: λ_{max} = 344 nm (DMSO)

2,3,7,8-tetrahydroxy-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene 9: A 1M solution of BBr₃ in DCM (22.2 mL, 22.2 mmol) was added in drops to a solution of **8** (1g, 2.77mmol) in anhydrous DMSO (50mL) at -78°C. The resulting reaction mixture was stirred at -78°C for 4h and 12h at room temperature. The crude mixture was poured into water and the resulting solid was filtered and washed with water and then with DCM. The residue was finally taken in acetone and evaporated to get **9** as brown solid (780 mg, 95%). ¹H NMR (DMSO, 300 MHz): δ 7.12(s, 2H), 7.31 (s, 2H), 9.38 (d, J = 18Hz, 4H); ¹³C NMR (DMSO, 75 MHz) δ 106.2, 109.6, 125.7, 129.9, 131.8, 145.0, 145.1. EI-HRMS obsd 303.9863, calcd 303.9864 [C₁₄H₈O₄S₂].

2,3,7,8-bis(ethylenedioxy)-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene 2: Potassium carbonate (4.25 g, 30.75 mmol) was added to a solution of **9** (780 mg, 2.56 mmol) in anhydrous DMSO (20 mL) and stirred under argon. Then 1, 2-dibromoethane (1.20 g, 6.41 mmol) was added in drops and refluxed for 20h. After cooling to room temperature the reaction mixture was poured into water and the solid was filtered out which was further subjected to vacuum sublimation (source temperature: 360 °C under ~10⁻⁵ Pa) to get **2** as yellow solid (290 mg, 32%). ¹H NMR (DMSO, 400 MHz): δ 4.32 (s, 8H), 7.41 (s, 2H), 7.59 (s, 2H); ¹³C NMR (DMSO, 100 MHz) δ 64.1, 64.2, 108.3, 111.7, 126.9, 131.1, 134.1, 142.6, 142.7 ; EI-HRMS obsd 356.0185, calcd 356.0177 [C₁₈H₁₂O₄S₂]. UV-vis abs.: λ_{max} = 347 nm (DMSO)

2,3,7,8-bis(methylenedioxy)-[1]benzothieno[3,2-b][1]benzothiophene 3: Cesium fluoride (2.5 g, 16.43 mmol) was added to a solution of **9** (500 mg, 1.64 mmol) in anhydrous DMF (5 mL). Once reaction mixture became cooler, added dibromomethane (714 mg, 4.11 mmol) in drops and refluxed under argon for 20h. After cooling to room temperature the reaction mixture was poured into sodium bisulphite solution and the residue was filtered and washed with saturated solution of K₂CO₃ followed by water and then with methanol. The brownish solid was further subjected to vacuum sublimation (source temperature: 330 °C under ~10⁻⁵ Pa) to get **3** as yellow powder (215mg, 40%). ¹H NMR (DMSO, 300 MHz): δ 6.13 (s, 4H), 7.52 (s, 2H), 7.67 (s, 2H); EI-HRMS obsd 327.9862, calcd 327.9864 [C₁₆H₈O₄S₂]. UV-vis abs.: λ_{max} = 350 nm (DMSO).

Single-Crystal X-ray Diffraction

Single-Crystal data collection was carried out with Oxford Diffraction Xcalibur E using MoKα radiation (λ = 0.71073Å). The crystal structure was solved by direct methods using SIR92 [22] for **2** and SHELXS [23] for **3**. Refinement of the crystal structures was performed by full matrix least-squares methods based on F² using SHELXL-2014/7 [23] and Sheldrick, G. M. SHELXTL Version 2014/7 [http://shelx.uni-ac.gwdg.de/SHELX/index.php]. In **2** the terminal dioxane group was disordered equally over two orientations. The disordered atoms were treated by using EADP, DELU and SIMU instruction in SHELXL-2014/7. The displacement parameters of all non-H-atoms were treated anisotropically. H-atoms were placed at calculated positions using suitable riding models with fixed isotropic thermal parameters [U_{iso}(H)=1.2U_{eqv}(C) for CH and CH₂ groups]. Crystal data for **2** and **3** are summarized in Table S1. Crystallographic data (cif) have been deposited with the Cambridge

Structural Data Centre (CCDC) with reference numbers 1844503 and 1844504 for compounds **2** and **3** respectively.

Hirshfeld Surface Analysis

Hirshfeld Surfaces [24] and the associated fingerprint plots [25] were calculated using Crystal Explorer, [Crystalexplorer (Version 3.1), University of Western Australia: 2012] which accepts a structure input file in the CIF format. Bond lengths to hydrogen atoms were set to typical neutron values (C-H=1.083Å). For each point on the Hirshfeld isosurface, two distances d_e, the distance from the point to the nearest nucleus external to the surface, and d_i, the distance to the nearest nucleus internal to the surface, are defined. The normalized contact distance (d_{norm}) based on d_e and d_i is given by

$$d_{\text{norm}} = \frac{(d_i - r_i^{\text{vdW}})}{r_i^{\text{vdW}}} + \frac{(d_e - r_e^{\text{vdW}})}{r_e^{\text{vdW}}}$$

where r_i^{vdW} and r_e^{vdW} are the van der Waals radii of the atoms. The value of d_{norm} is negative or positive depending if the intermolecular contacts are shorter or longer than the van der Waals separations. The parameter d_{norm} displays a surface with a red-white-blue color scheme, where bright red spots highlight shorter contacts, white areas represent contacts around the van der Waals separation, and blue regions are devoid of close contacts.

Electrochemistry

Dichloromethane (HPLC grade) and tetra-n-butylammonium hexafluorophosphate (TBAP, electrochemical grade, Fluka) was recrystallised from ethanol. Cyclic voltammetry (CV) was performed in a three-electrode cell equipped with a platinum milli-electrode, a platinum wire counter-electrode and a silver wire used as a quasi-reference electrode. The electrochemical experiments were carried out under a dry and oxygen-free atmosphere (H₂O < 1 ppm, O₂ < 1 ppm) in CH₂Cl₂ with TBAP (0.1 M) as the support electrolyte. The voltammograms were recorded on a potentiostat/galvanostat (BioLogic – SP150) driven by the EC-Lab software with positive feedback compensation. Based on repetitive measurements, absolute errors on potentials were estimated to be ≈ ± 5 mV. All the potential reported below, were calibrated versus Ferrocene/Ferrocenium oxidation potential (+0.405V vs SCE or +0.425V vs. Ag/AgCl).

Photoelectron spectroscopy in air (PESA)

The ionization potentials of powders of **2** and **3** were measured with an AC-2 Photoelectron Spectrometer (RKI Instruments), working in ambient conditions and scanning the incident UV photon energy from 4.5 eV to 6.2 eV.

Quantum-chemical calculations

The geometrical and electronic properties of all the molecules have been calculated within the Gaussian 09 package (Revision A02) [26] at the Density Functional Theory (DFT) level using the B3LYP functional and the 6-31G** basis set.

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